

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1963-64

Second Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: Dr. JOHN FAIRBAIRN

Conductor: SIDNEY NEWMAN

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 31st OCTOBER, 1963

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

1. OVERTURE: "PROMETHEUS"

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

The ballet called "The Men of Prometheus," for which Beethoven wrote the music, was produced at the Burg Theatre in 1801, and was such a success that a pianoforte score of the music was immediately published. It contains some of the most delightful of Beethoven's lighter work, and a revival of the whole in ballet form would be of more than historic interest. The well-known Overture has a short but solemn introduction to a lively and brilliantly scored movement, which familiarity cannot rob of its freshness.

M. G.

2. PASTORALE d'ÉTÉ

Honegger
(1892-1955)

Symphonic poem for small orchestra (1921).

3. PASSACAGLIA, CHORALE AND FUGUE (Opus 18)

Kenneth Leighton (b. 1929)

This work (completed in 1957 and first performed by the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra the following year) is closely related to "The Light Invisible", a large-scale choral work written for the Three Choirs Festival of 1958 and based on a text from the Lamentations and De Profundis. The orchestral work (also given at the Three Choirs Festival this year) has no "programme" and there is no conscious attempt to express specific ideas or feelings. But as in "The Light Invisible" the music does, I think, contain the doubts, fears and questionings which so many feel in the face of religion today. At the end of the choral work extracts from "The Rock" by T. S. Eliot are set in the manner of a chorale, as an attempt to achieve a final culminative and positive statement. So also in the Fugue of the orchestral work a traditional and well-known hymn, Ein' Feste Burg, is introduced in the final paragraph, and set directly "against" the rhythmic and chromatic nature of the fugal material. The hymn occurred to the composer only in the final stages of composition and is (by a coincidence later pointed out by a conductor) foreshadowed in the shape of the chorale-theme of the second movement.

The Passacaglia theme has twelve different notes, but the music

is not serial, and the note-row is used as a theme, not as a constructional basis. Over the first three statements of the ground the strings enter fugally with a second theme which is also varied and extended during the course of the movement. Another three slow variations produce a build up, which leads directly into an Allegro. This begins with a new version of the string theme, and this is discussed for a while before the ground reappears against it on the brass. The fourths present in the ground break into a brass fanfare, and this in turn leads to an "appassionato" climax.

The striving mood of the Allegro gives way (without a break) to the Chorale, which is headed by the words "Plebs Angelica . . .", the first line of a medieval prayer to the angelic host. Here the music tries to transform the more "human" striving of the Passacaglia into the calm and mystery of such a vision. The phrases of the chorale melody alternate with soft fugal string passages, which use the twelve-note theme of the Passacaglia.

The Fugue is headed by another quotation:

"Dic Christi Veritas,
dic cara raritas,
dic rara caritas,
ubi nunc habitas?"

and the fugue-subject is closely related to the twelve-note theme. The movement is in two main sections, the second of these presenting a new counter-subject, and culminating in a declaimed brass entry. The coda, as previously mentioned, is in the manner of a chorale-prelude on "Ein' Feste Burg". The tempo changes to 9/8 and a new version of the fugue subject appears on flute and bassoon. The Chorale is presented against this on brass in a quadruple time which cuts across the basic 9/8 of the fugal theme. The meaning of the work lies in the tension created by the juxtaposition of these various elements.

K. L.

INTERVAL

4. SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN E FLAT

Sibelius
(1865-1958)

Tempo molto moderato—Largamente—Allegro
moderato—Presto
Andante mosso, quasi allegretto
Allegro molto

First performed in 1915 at the national festival in celebration of the composer's fiftieth birthday, this symphony, the most easily accessible and popular of the seven, was subsequently twice re-

written. Whilst the outstanding character and lasting effect are of supreme happiness, already established with confident gaiety long before the end of the first movement as assuredly as in any Beethoven Scherzo, yet, despite the calm prospect of the opening, this broad plateau of delight is to be reached only by ways enshrouded in chromatic mists wherein every motif appears strangely pathetic, if not indeed lugubrious.

Whilst the way towards this superbly joyous optimism had already been blazoned in the course of earlier symphonies—with majestic D major triumph in the conclusion of the second, with sturdy C major gaiety in the opening and conclusion of the third, and with almost naively impertinent delight in the outset of the radiant A major finale of the fourth—what is unique in this symphony is that this optimism overcomes misgivings at a comparatively early point in the sequence of events and thereafter pervades the whole scene like some great radiant corridor of highest cirrus cloud spanning the whole blue of heaven. Things that have gone before are turned to new effect. The lugubrious mystery already remarked, of bassoon with ultra chromatic strings, stems from the development of that most concentrated experience Symphony No. 4.

The G major Andante is a movement of exquisite tenderness and sensitivity, pervaded by one haunting rhythm—an utterly different realisation of the ostinato principle so melodiously experienced in the slow movement of Symphony No. 3; but the varied colouring of the lightly touched pizzicato and staccato of strings and woodwind is scattered upon a background of sustained harmonies poised over all like the sweet influence of the Pleiades, blurring the ear that seeks to discriminate by the gentle conflict of sharp and flattened fourths (so precious a delight to Sibelius).

The restless gaiety of the Finale stems from such experience as that of the strings in the finale of No. 4, but here it echoes the very notes which had pounded out the ultimate triumph of this first movement; then jubilation bestrides the very bells, whose motif at the last is built up into a majestic paean of overwhelming sonority.

S. T. M. N.